



September 13, 2011

Dear Colleagues,

Congratulations on a smooth and successful start to the 2011-12 school year. The first day of school is an exhilarating time for all of us, and I want to thank you for your careful preparation and dedication to our shared cause: setting all of our students on a path to college and career readiness.

As you know, we have established two instructional expectations for the school year: strengthening student work and strengthening teacher practice. I am writing to clarify the expectations around strengthening student work. Our goal is to raise standards for our students' work in order to equip our students with the skills they'll need later in life. To this end, our 2011-12 citywide instructional expectations for strengthening student work are for schools to:

- This fall, review samples of student work in your teacher teams and find the gaps between what students currently know and are able to do and the demands of the Common Core. This analysis should inform your decisions about what and how you teach. Some teams started this work on the additional day of professional development last week, which was added to the calendar with collaborative support of the NYCDOE, the United Federation of Teachers, and the Council of Supervisors and Administrators.
- Throughout the winter and spring of 2011-12, engage all students in at least one culminating literacy assessment and one culminating math assessment embedded in well-sequenced units of instruction that are fully aligned to selected Common Core standards.

For more information on our instructional work this year, I encourage you to explore our Common Core Library online at <http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/CommonCoreLibrary>. This online hub provides a wealth of resources, including Common Core-aligned tasks, rubrics, unit supports, and examples of student work illustrating these more rigorous standards. We will continue to add to and refine this site throughout the school year based on your feedback, so please visit it frequently over the school year.

Finally, networks have been focusing on this work over the summer and will be partnering with schools to understand and facilitate your professional learning. Networks will be working with teacher teams to analyze student work and data to understand gaps in knowledge and help you improve our students' learning experience.

I am excited and inspired by the work we've done together so far, but the tough work has just begun. To succeed in college, in 21st century careers, and in life, our students need to master basic skills—but they also need to learn to think creatively, solve problems, make effective arguments, and engage in debates. I am confident that our continued collective focus—led by your work in the classroom—will result in richer instructional experiences and robust student learning. Best wishes for a productive school year, and thank you for everything you do for our students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Dennis M. Walcott'.

Dennis M. Walcott